

Hearing and Seeing in Paul:

The Interplay of Auditory and Visual Elements

Takaaki HARAGUCHI

Introduction

Faith occurs as a response to the divine call to believe in God and his message. The knowledge of the unseen God and his sovereign will can be available through the actions of divine self-revelation. God's self-revelation must be recognized as such and accepted by human beings before it creates faith among them. The recognition of the revelation is usually mediated by sensory experiences of hearing the word of God or seeing its signs on the part of human beings.

In Rom 10:17a, Paul states that 'faith comes from hearing (what is heard).'¹ Christian faith would be impossible without hearing the words of proclamation. Paul poses a series of rhetorical questions to himself saying, "How will they call on the one they did not believe in? How will they believe in the one they did not hear of? How will they hear without proclaimers?"

(Rom 10:14). It is quite natural for a passionate missionary like Paul to emphasize the importance of proclamation and its hearing, for he was convinced he had received a divine call to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ among the Gentiles (Gal 1:15–

1 The Greek noun ἀκοή used in Rom 10:17 can mean the act of hearing (2 Sam 22:15 LXX; 2 Pet 2:8) or an object of hearing (Isa 53:1 LXX; Rom 10:16). See G. Kittel, "ἀκούω, ἀκοή κτλ.," *TDNT* 1 (1964): 216–225; G. Schneider, "ἀκούω, ἀκοή," *EWNT* (2nd. ed.) 1 (1992): 126–131.

16).

On the other hand, Paul occasionally refers to his visionary experience at the time of his conversion to defend his apostleship before his skeptical readers (cf. 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8; Gal 1:15–16). The experience of receiving a vision of the risen Lord is critically important as a proof of his apostleship as in the case of the other apostles (cf. Matt 28:16–20; Luke 24:44–49; John 20:19–23; 1 Cor 15:5, 7). How is this fact harmonized with his strong emphasis on preaching and hearing a Christian message? The relationship between hearing the words of proclamation and his unique visionary experience is a matter which deserves a careful scholarly investigation. In this study I will analyze this neglected issue exegetically, based on Paul's own statements on auditory and visual elements in early Christian proclamation.

1. Hearing as the Primary Source of Faith

1.1 The Word of God and the Task of Proclamation

God is basically invisible to human eyes. No human being was able to see God (Exod 33:20; John 1:18; 1 John 4:12; 1 Tim 6:16) apart from exceptional occasions (e.g. Gen 26:24; 32:31; Exod 3:6; 24:10–11; Deut 34:10; Judg 13:20–22; 1 Kgs 22:19; Isa 6:1, 5; Ezek 1:1, 26–28).² Nevertheless, the invisible God exists and acts with his words. The Psalmists claim in doxological verses that the created world reflects his glory (Ps 8:2–10; 19:2–7; 148:3–4; cf. Wis 13:1–9; Acts 17:24–27; Rom 1:19–20).³ More-

2 J. Joosten, "Seeing God in the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint," *Gottesschau – Gotteserkenntnis* ed. E. G. Dafni; WUNT 387 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2017), 19–27.

over, God reveals his sovereign will to the world by his utterances. In the beginning God created the world with his words (Gen 1:1-2:4a; Ps 33:6, 9; 148:5).⁴ In Old Testament narratives God occasionally spoke to the patriarchs and gave them his commands and promises at the crucial moments of their life (cf. Gen 2:16-17; 3:9, 11, 14-19; 4:6-7; 6:13-21; 9:1-7; 12:1-3, 7; 15:1, 4-5, 7; 26:3; 28:13-15 etc.).⁵ In the history of Israel God spoke to the Israelites through his human emissaries (Heb 1:1-5). He chose his prophets and commissioned them with his words at the critical turning points of the history of Israel (Exod 3:4-22; 6:10-13; 2 Sam 7:4-17; Isa 6:8-10; 40:1-11; Jer 1:4-5, 7-10, 17-19; Ezek 2:1-8 etc.).⁶

In the New Testament it is stressed that nobody has seen God except for his Son, namely, Jesus Christ (John 1:18; 1 John 4:12; 1 Tim 6:16). The chance to see God face to face is reserved for the end time (1 Cor 13:12; cf. Matt 5:8; 1 John 3:2; Rev 22:4).⁷ God sent his Son to the world out of his love for it (John 3:16). God revealed his will through the words and acts of his Son (cf. John 1:18). In New Testament times God no longer spoke to human beings directly. He always spoke through his Son, Jesus

3 James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 468-473; W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 156-157.

4 Brueggemann, *Theology*, 148, 153-154.

5 Ibid., 164-169.

6 Ibid., 622-649.

7 G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 647-649; W. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*. EKK 7/3 (Zürich: Benzinger; Neukirchewn-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999), 314.

Christ (cf. Heb 1:1).

Jesus Christ was obedient to the will of God (Rom 5:19). He emptied himself and took the form of a servant, namely, humanity (Phil 2:5-11). In his life on earth he obeyed God to die on the Cross (Phil 2:8; Heb 5:8). His obedient action brought about grace, righteousness, and life (Rom 5:15-21). After the death and resurrection of Jesus the resurrected one appeared to his disciples and entrusted them with the ministry of proclamation to the people in the world (Mt 28:16-20; Luke 24:44-49).⁸ In the same way the resurrected Lord appeared to Paul on his way to Damascus and commissioned him to evangelize in the world (1 Cor 9:1; 15:8-10; Gal 1:15-16). With the help of the Holy Spirit the leaders of the early church went out and proclaimed the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:14-36; 3:17-26; 6:6-7; 10:34-43; 13:16-41; 17:22-31; Rom 1:1-5; 1 Cor 15:1-8 etc.).

1.2 Hearing and Believing

It belongs to the common understanding of the early church that faith comes from hearing the gospel (Rom 10:17; cf. John 17:20). The act of hearing proceeds to that of believing, which will eventually lead to salvation. The early Christians went through the process of hearing the words of proclamation and believing in Jesus Christ as the Messiah (cf. Acts 2:37-41; 10:44-48; 15:11; 1 Cor 15:1-2, 11; Gal 3:2 etc.). Especially, Gentile believers were those who had heard the early Christian keryg-

8 B. J. Hubbard, "Commissioning Stories in Luke-Acts: A Study of their Antecedents, Form and Content," *Semeia* 8 (1977): 116-117.

ma and had converted from the worship of pagan gods in the Greco-Roman world to the monotheistic faith in the living and true God (1 Thess 1:9-10).⁹ The act of hearing the gospel was an indispensable component of the process of conversion.

Nevertheless, human responses to the gospel are actually divided (Rom 10:16). Some people accepted the message and became believers (Acts 2:41; 13:48; 17:34; 1 Cor 2:1-5; 15:1-2; Gal 3:1-5; 1 Thess 1:9-10 etc.). But others rejected it and showed even antagonistic attitudes toward the missionary activities of the early church (Acts 4:5-18; 6:8-15; 13:44-47; 17:32; 22:22-23; Rom 11:28 etc.). Hearing involves listening to the pronounced words with ears and understanding their message in mind.¹⁰ Hearing does not necessarily produce proper understanding among the listeners (Mark 4:12; 6:52; 8:17-18; John 12:40; Rom 11:8; cf. Isa 6:9-10; Jer 5:21; Ezek 12:2).¹¹ The acceptance of the message is dependent on the openness of their heart. Human will is involved in the process of believing. A stubborn heart is not willing to listen to the words of God (Jer 5:23; 9:13; Ezek 2:1-9; Ps 78:8; Rom 2:5; 9:18; 11:7, 25; 2 Cor 3:14; Eph 4:18; Heb 3:8, 15; 4:7) and slow in understanding them (Matt 13:15; Mark 6:52; 8:17; John 12:40; Acts 28:26-27).¹² The stubbornness of the heart or stiff-neckedness eventually leads to the rejection of what is heard (Exod 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9; Deut 9:6, 13; 2 Kings 17:14; Neh 9:26, 29; Sir 16:11; Bar 2:30; Acts 7:51).¹³ Paul thinks

9 U. Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*. 5th revised. ed. (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2016), 180-182.

10 M. Wolter, *Paulus. Ein Grundriss seiner Theologie*. 2. rev. ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2015), 78-79.

11 See Brueggemann, *Theology*, 632-633; J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah*. Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 100-102.

that the obstinacy of the Israelites facing the gospel of Jesus Christ is predestined by God (Rom 11:7). But he hopes their stubbornness will be taken away after the full number of the Gentiles are converted and saved (11:25). All the Israelites will be finally saved (11:26), for they are loved by God because of the election of their ancestors (11:28).

The proclaimers of the divine message are confronted with the problem of disbelief on the side of their audience. Moses, for example, performed miracles before the eyes of Pharaoh. They were meant to be visible signs to prove the authenticity of his message (Exod 4:8-9, 17, 30; 7:3, 8-9; 10:2; 11:9-10; Acts 7:36), for miraculous works were thought to be manifestations of divine power (cf. Num 14:11, 22; Deut 4:34; 6:22; Isa 7:11, 14; 38:7-8 etc.). However, the Egyptian king did not believe what Moses told him because God had made him obstinate (Exod 4:21; 7:3-4, 13; 8:11; 9:7, 34-35; 10:1). This particular case highlights the limitation of the effects of visible signs however spectacular they might be.

The prophecies given in the history of Israel were not easy to accept because they demanded from the Israelites a radical change of their way and their return to Yahweh (Isa 6:10; 48:6;

12 See “πωρόω, πώρωσις,” *EWNT* (2nd rev. ed.) 3 (1992): 488; K.L. Schmidt, “πωρόω, πώρωσις,” *TDNT* 5 (1964):1025-1028; J. Behm, “σκληροκαρδία,” *TDNT* 3 (1964): 613-614; P. Fiedler, “σκληροκαρδία, σκληρός, σκληρότης,” *EWNT* (2nd rev. ed.) 3 (1992): 606-608; F. Baumgärtel / J. Behm, “καρδία,” *TDNT* 3 (1964): 605-614; A. Sand, “καρδία,” *EWNT* (2nd rev. ed.) 2 (1992): 615-619; A. Heath Jones III, “Stubborn,” *NIDB* 5 (2009): 388; K. Berger, “Hartherzigkeit und Gottes Gesetz. Die Vorgeschichte des antijüdischen Vorwurfs in Mc 10,5,” *ZNW* 61 (1972): 1-47.

13 J. Wolfe, “Stiff-necked,” *NIDB* 5 (2009): 379.

Jer 3:12, 14; 4:1; 24:7; Hos 3:5; 5:4; Joel 2:12, 13; Zach 1:3 etc.). At the time of commissioning the prophets were told beforehand that their words would not be accepted by their audience wholeheartedly. The Israelites would rather close their eyes and ears to the prophetic messages (Isa 6:9-10; 42:20; 43:8; Jer 5:21; 6:10; 8:27-28). They were stubborn in heart (Jer 7:24-26; 9:13; 11:8; 13:10; 16:12; 18:12; Ezek 2:4; 3:7) and rebellious to the will of God (Isa 30:9-11; Jer 3:13, 20; 5:23; 8:5; 11:9-10; Ezek 2:3, 5-6; Acts 7:51). They were so to speak 'uncircumcised in heart' (Jer 9:25). The true understanding of the divine message will not be given till the hearts of the Israelites are fundamentally renewed by God (Jer 24:7; 32:39; Ezek 11:19; 18:31; 36:26-27).

There are cases of a positive response to the word of God. Abraham, for example, obeyed a divine command and set out for the promised land when he was told to leave his country and kinsfolk in Haran (Gen 12:1-6; Heb 11:8-10). Later on he believed the word of God promising him progeny though he and his wife Sarah were advanced in age (Gen 15:6). Though the promise was contrary to human expectations, he believed it because of his faith in God (cf. Rom 4:18-21).

In prophetic call narratives the prophets showed their obedience to the divine words.¹⁴ When Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord on the heavenly throne (Isa 6:1; cf. Kgs 22:19), he heard a word of God asking for an emissary to dispatch (Isa 6:8ab). He

14 See N. Habel, "The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives," *ZAW* 36 (1965): 297-323; B.O. Long, "Prophetic Call Traditions and Reports of Visions," *ZAW* 84 (1972): 494-500; B.J. Hubbard, "Commissioning Stories in Luke-Acts: A Study of their Antecedents, Form and Content," *Semeia* 8 (1977): 103-107.

volunteered to be sent as a prophet (6:8c). However, prophets were often compelled to speak the word of God against their will.¹⁵ Jeremiah was hesitant to become a prophet when the divine plan to make him a prophet to the nations was revealed to him (Jer 1:4-6). Though he thought he was too young for the prophetic office, Yahweh did not allow him to evade his call and sent him with the words of assurance (1:6-10). Jeremiah obeyed the word of God to be a prophet and announced very harsh divine words to Israel (2:1-3:5; 3:6-13; 4:5-22 etc.).

Faith is characterized as obedience to the word of God (Rom 1:5; 10:16; 15:18; 16:19). The rejection of the gospel of Christ amounts to an act of disobedience (10:21). A majority of the Israelites at the time of Paul's missionary activities stumbled on the Christian message and did not accept it (9:30-33; 11:11-12). They actually became the enemies of the gospel (Rom 11:28; cf. 1 Thess 2:14), though Paul did not give up his eschatological hope for their final conversion and subsequent salvation (Rom 11:25-29). Their stubbornness was supposed to be predestined by God. It would continue till a majority of the Gentiles become converted to Christianity (Rom 9:18; 11:7, 25).

2. Seeing as a Secondary Source of Faith

2.1 Visual Experience as Authorization

The Gospel of John shows two contrasting attitudes to the act of seeing in the process of believing in Jesus as the Messiah. On one hand, the miracles performed by Jesus are regarded as

15 Brueggemann, *Theology*, 630; Habel, "The Form and Significance," 300-301; Hubbard, "Commissioning Stories," 105.

the signs that reveal his glory as the Son of God (John 2:11, 23; 4:54; 6:2, 14, 26; 7:31; 9:16; 11:47; 12:18, 37; 20:30). It is reported that those who witnessed his signs, namely, healing activities believed in Jesus (2:23; 6:14).¹⁶ In the concluding statement of the fourth Gospel it is claimed that the signs Jesus performed were written down so that the readers might believe in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God to have eternal life (John 20:30–31).

On the other hand, dissenting critical voices are also heard in John. It is recognized that the faith based on seeing signs is not sufficient (John 4:48). In the resurrection narrative the disciples of Jesus saw the risen Lord and believed (20:20, 27–28). But the risen Christ who showed his body with the scars of crucifixion to Thomas and said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen? Blessed are those who do not see but believe” (20:29). Thomas should have believed when he first heard the word about the appearance of the risen Lord (20:25). This critical comment on the faith based on signs reflects the standpoint of the redactor of the fourth Gospel.¹⁷

The visionary experience of the risen Christ was limited to the leaders in the first generation of Christians (1 Cor 15:5–8). The Christians in the next generation believed in the risen Lord without seeing him with their eyes (1 Pet 1:8–9). This fact did not pose a major obstacle to proclamation, for the true ori-

16 Brueggemann, *Theology*, 630.

17 R. Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*. KEK 2; 10th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1941), 539–540; J. Zumstein, *Das Johannesevangelium*. KEK 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 766–767.

gin of the Christian faith is not seeing but hearing (cf. John 20:29).¹⁸

In Paul, however, there is no criticism of visual experience as a source of believing the Christian message. Without reservation Paul refers to the epiphany event he personally experienced and the subsequent reception of his apostolic call. In defense of his apostolic office he declares to the Corinthian readers that he has seen “Jesus our Lord” (1 Cor 9:1; cf. Acts 9:27).¹⁹ This subjective experience is thought to prove the authenticity of his apostleship and the truth of the gospel he preached.²⁰ Furthermore, the epiphany experience put him among the witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (1 Cor 15:5–8).²¹ In Galatians he refers to it in the context of looking back to his early life of apostolic ministry (Gal 1:13–

18 R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*. AB29A; 2 Vols (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970) 2:1048–51; R. Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium*. 3rd ed.; HTKNT IV/3 (Freiburg: Herder, 1979) 3:398–399; U. Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*. 5th rev. ed. (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2016), 389–390 thinks John 20:29 is meant to be an encouraging comment for the Christians in later generations who have no chance to see the resurrected one physically.

19 C. Dietzfelbinger, *Die Berufung des Paulus als Ursprung seiner Theologie* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989), 54–56; B. Heininger, *Paulus als Visionär* (Freiburg i.B: Herder, 1996), 185–189; U. Schnelle, *Paulus. Leben und Denken* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 78.

20 Schnelle, *Paulus*, 77 emphasizes Paul’s apologetic intention against the attacks on his apostolic office.

21 Dietzfelbinger, *Berufung*, 48, 56–60; K. O. Sandnes, *Paul – One of the Prophets?* WUNT 2.43 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1991), 48–70; J. Becker, *Paulus. Der Apostel der Völker*. 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1998), 76–77; M. Wolter, *Paulus. Ein Grundriss seiner Theologie*. 2th ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2015), 25.

24).²² The epiphany of the risen Lord, namely, the Son of God marks the turning point of his life. Before that incident he was a pious Jew enthusiastically observing the commandments of the written and oral Torah (Gal 1:14; Phil 3:6b).²³ He persecuted the church of Christ out of his zeal for the Torah (1 Cor 15:9; Phil 3:6a).²⁴ A vision of the risen Lord, however, put a definite end to his life as a persecutor of the church. It rather gave him a call to his apostolic mission as a proclaimer of the gospel (1 Cor 15:9–11; Gal 1:16).²⁵ From that time on he identified himself as an apostle proclaiming the gospel of Christ among the Gentiles (Rom 1:1; 11:13; 1 Cor 1:1; 4:9; 9:1–2; 15:9; 2 Cor 1:1; 12:12; Gal 1:1).²⁶

The way Paul describes his apostolic call before his birth (Gal 1:15) reminds us of a prophetic call narrative in Jeremiah 1. It is stated that Jeremiah was set apart to be a “prophet to nations” before his birth (Jer 1:5; cf. Isa 44:24; 49:1).²⁷ Both ac-

22 Dietzfelbinger, *Berufung*, 45–46; W. Baird, “Vision, Revelation and Ministry: Reflection on 2 Cor 12:1–5 and Gal 1:11–17,” *JBL* 104 (1985): 656–661.

23 B. J. Lappenga, *Paul’s Language of Ζῆλος: Monosemy and the Rhetoric of Identity and Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 141–143; S. E. Porter, *The Apostle Paul: His Life, Thought, and Letters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 27–30.

24 Dietzfelbinger, *Berufung*, 10–15; Schnelle, *Paulus*, 71–75; Porter, *Apostle*, 29; E. Ebel, “Das Leben des Paulus,” in *Paulus: Leben-Umwelt-Werk-Briefe*. ed. O. Wischmeyer; UTB2767; 2. Aufl. (Tübingen: A. Francke, 2012), 114–115; D. A. Cambell, *Paul: An Apostle’s Journey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018) 15, 22; N. T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018) 27–39.

25 Heininger, *Visionär*, 189; Schnelle, *Paulus*, 80; Porter, *Apostle*, 30–32; Ebel, “Das Leben des Paulus,” 115; Cambell, *Paul*, 23–24; Wright, *Biography*, 41–59.

26 Schnelle, *Paulus*, 92–94; Wolter, *Grundriss*, 26–27.

counts are utilized as means of authorization for the prophetic office to convey the utterance of God to humanity. There are, however, some differences between the two accounts. God is referred to in the third person in Galatians 1 while God speaks in the first person in Jer 1:4-5, 7-8 as in the case of other prophetic call narratives (cf. Isa 6:8; Ezek 2:1-8 etc.).²⁸ The call account in Galatians is a part of the autobiographical narrative concerning Paul's call and early life as a missionary (cf. Gal 1:13-2:14), while Jeremiah's call narrative is presented as a dialogue between God and the prophet in the introductory part of the Book of Jeremiah. The words of God are cited directly. It is stressed in the Book of Jeremiah that the word of God came to him and announced Jeremiah's call to prophetic office (Jer 1:4-5, 7-8). Auditory elements are predominant, though there are some visual elements in the story, for the action of God extending his hand and touching Jeremiah's mouth is also mentioned (cf. Jer 1:9).²⁹ On the other hand, visual elements are predominant in Pauline call narrative.³⁰ It is the revelation of the Son that gave him the consciousness of his call to missionary work in the Gentile world (Gal 1:16). Here Paul refers to the same vi-

27 W.L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*. Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1986), 27-28; For more detailed analysis on the prophetic call narratives see D. L. Petersen, "Prophet, Prophecy," *NIDB* 1 (2006): 638-639; W.H. Myers, "Call, Calling, Call Stories," *NIDB* 1 (2006): 529; W. Baird, "Vision, Revelation and Ministry," 656-658; G. von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (2 Bde; München: Kaiser, 1960-62) 2: 62-82.

28 For the I-Style of the prophetic call narrative see von Rad, *Theologie*, 2:66-67.

29 See von Rad, *Theology*, 2:78; J.R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah*. Vol.1 AB21A (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 227-228.

30 H.D. Betz, *Galatians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 71.

sionary experience reported in 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8. The same event is described differently. In 1 Cor 9:1 Paul says, “I have seen the Lord.” while 1 Cor 15:8 reads, “Last of all he appeared to me, to one abnormally born.” The commission to apostolic office is supposed to be given verbally as the Luke’s dramatic depiction of Paul’s conversion and subsequent call to apostleship (cf. Acts 9:4-7, 11-16; 22:10-16; 26:12-23).³¹ Nevertheless, no concrete words of commissioning are explicitly cited in Pauline epistles. Auditory factors are rather subdued in Paul’s description of the event.

Though the sovereign will of God determines the course of events in both stories, the way it is revealed is not identical. In Jeremiah’s call narrative, God appeared and spoke to the prophet directly (Jer 1:4-5, 7-8). Jeremiah saw visions and heard the words of God just as other OT prophets did at the time of their call (Jer 1:11-14; cf. Isa 6:1-13; Ezek 1:1, 26-28; 2:1-10 etc.).³² In New Testament times the early Christians believed that the chance to see God was reserved for the end time (1 Cor 13:12).

31 See Porter, *Apostle*, 32; T. Mullins, “New Testament Commission Forms, Especially in Luke-Acts,” *JBL* 95 (1976): 603-614; B.J. Hubbard, “Commissioning Stories in Luke-Acts: A Study of their Antecedents, Form and Content,” *Semeia* 8 (1977): 117-120; C.W. Hedrick, “Paul’s Conversion / Call: A Comparable Analysis of three Reports in Acts,” *JBL* 100 (1981): 415-432; J.F. Miller, *Convinced that God had Called Us: Dreams, Visions, and the Perception of God’s Will in Luke-Acts* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2007), 186-202; B.E. Wilson, “Hearing the Word and Seeing the Light: Voice and Vision in Acts,” *JSNT* 38 (2016): 456-481; D.T. Prince, “Seeing Visions: The Persuasive Power of Sight in the Acts of the Apostles,” *JSNT* 40 (2018): 341-343, 348-354.

32 With regard to the visions accompanying the prophetic call see Heininger, *Visionär*, 51-72

Paul did not see a vision of God but that of the risen Christ.³³ Not theophany but Christophany is repeatedly reported by Paul (1 Cor 9:1; 15:8; Gal 1:15-16). God called him to apostolic ministry through the risen Christ. Paul's Christocentric way of thinking dates back to the time of his call.³⁴

2.2 Ascent to Heaven as a Visionary Experience

Visionary experiences were not limited to the time of Paul's call to apostleship. In 2 Corinthians 12 he refers to an ecstatic experience of his ascent to heaven which took place 14 years before the time of writing this apologetic letter (2 Cor 12:1-2).³⁵ He was caught up in heaven in ecstasy to see visions and hear unspeakable things (12:1-4).

Visionary experiences are often reported in apocalyptic literature, for a vision of heavenly beings is regarded as an important means of the revelation of the divine will (cf. 1 Enoch 1:2; 2 Bar 81:4).³⁶ Moreover, ascent to heaven (or an otherworldly journey) is one of the favorite themes in apocalyptic writings (Mart. Isa 4:13-17, 18-23, 24-27, 28-31; Apoc. Abr 12:1-4; 15:1-7; T. Abr 10:1-15:15; T. Lev 2:5-5:7).³⁷ The patriarch Enoch, for example, is reported to have ascended to heaven to witness what is happening in the heavenly temple (1 Enoch 14:8; 39:3; 52:1; 2 Enoch 8:1-8; 20:1-4; cf. Gen 5:21-24).³⁸ In Revelation 4 the

33 Baird, "Vision, Revelation and Ministry," 659.

34 Wolter, *Grundriss*, 28.

35 Baird, "Vision, Revelation and Ministry," 653-655; Heininger, *Visionär*, 246-253; E.A. Judge, "Paul's Boasting in Relation to Contemporary Professional Practice," *ABR* 16 (1968): 37-50; H. Saake, "Paulus als Ekstatiker: Pneumatologische Beobachtung zu 2 Kor. xii.1-10," *NovT* 15 (1973): 152-160.

narrator of the ongoing extraordinary events saw a vision of an open gate to heaven and heard a voice to urge him to come up there (Rev 4:1). The seer was immediately taken up to heaven in ecstasy and saw a vision of God on the throne and a crowd of angels surrounding and praising him (4:2-11; 5:8-12).

Paul shows a rather reserved attitude toward this mysterious experience of ascent to heaven and seeing heavenly visions though he recognizes the legitimacy of apocalyptic vision as a means of revelation (cf. 1 Cor 14:6, 26). First of all, he had been silent about it for fourteen years before he broke his silence before the readers of the Second Corinthians (2 Cor 12:1-3). In addition, he was reluctant to describe before his Corinthian readers the concrete content he saw in heaven.³⁹ Furthermore, there was a possibility of personal pride attached to an extraor-

36 Heininger, *Visionär*, 111-135; A.R. Segal, "Heavenly Ascent in Hellenistic Judaism, Early Christianity and their Environment," *ANRW* II.23.2 (1980):1333-1394; A.T. Lincoln, "Paul the Visionary: The Setting and Significance of the Rapture to Paradise in II Corinthians XII.1-10," *NTS* 25 (1979): 216-217; idem., *Paradise Now and not Yet: Studies in the role of the Heavenly Dimension in Paul's Thought with Special Reference to his Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); M. Himmelfarb, "Ascent to Heaven," *NIDB* 1 (2006): 292-293; idem., *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

37 J.J. Collins, "Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14 (1979):6, 15, 28; idem., *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 42-46; J. P. Davies, *Paul among the Apocalypses? An Evaluation of the 'Apocalyptic Paul' in the Context of Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic Literature*. LNTS 562 (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 125-127, 132-136; Lincoln, *Paradise Now and not Yet*, 83-84; J.H. Charlesworth, "Paul, the Jewish Apocalypses, and Apocalyptic Eschatology," in *Paul the Jew*. G. Baccaccini and C. A. Segovia eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 96.

38 See J. D. Tabor, "Heaven, Ascent to," *ABD* 3 (1992): 91-94.

dinary religious experience (12:5). The danger of self-glorification caused by a journey to heaven and possession of special heavenly knowledge is attested by 4Q Self-glorification Hymn. The seer in this mysterious Dead Sea document claims that he is comparable to the angels in heaven and no one is comparable to him in glory (4Q491c. 6-9).⁴⁰ Paul is well aware of the danger of self-glorification. He refers to this ecstatic experience only to counter the claim of his boasting opponents (12:1). He thinks a 'thorn in the flesh' was given in order to prevent him from boasting about his special experience (12:7). He would rather boast about his weakness, for the grace of Christ is sufficiently manifested in it (11:30; 12:5, 9).⁴¹

2.3 Visionary Elements in Proclamation

Depiction of the Crucified One

The members of the Corinthian church came to believe after they heard and accepted the words of proclamation preached by Paul (1 Cor 15:1-2; cf. Acts 18:1-11). According to Paul's own explanation his proclamation was focused on the crucified one. His version of the gospel is called "the word of the Cross"

(1 Cor 1:18). At the time of his first missionary activity in Corinth he determined to know nothing except for Jesus Christ, the crucified one (2:2). He proclaimed the crucified one as the Messiah and said nothing else. That means that he depicted

39 Davies, *Paul among the Apocalypses?*, 141-142; Lincoln, *Paradise Now and not Yet*, 75.

40 M. Goff, "Heavenly Mysteries and Otherworldly Journeys," in *Paul the Jew*. G. Baccaccini and C. A. Segovia eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 143.

41 Lincoln, *Paradise Now and not Yet*, 75-76.

the image of the crucified one with his words before his Corinthian listeners. They believed in the crucified one as the Messiah.

In Gal 3:1 Paul looks back to his own missionary message to the Galatians saying, “Who bewitched you? Before your eyes Jesus Christ was depicted publicly as the crucified one.”⁴² As a matter of fact it was impossible for the Galatians to see the crucified Christ physically, for the crucifixion of Jesus took place in Jerusalem long before Paul conducted his missionary activities in Galatia. What the Galatians could do was only to imagine in their mind the crucifixion of Jesus described by Paul’s preaching. Nevertheless, we can confirm that the vivid visual image of the crucified one functioned as an effective means of persuasion. According to the Greco-Roman rhetorical theorists the use of a vivid visual image functioned as an effective rhetorical skill called *ekphrasis* (Theon, *Progymnasmata*, 118.7).⁴³ It serves to

42 The Greek verb προγράφω can mean “write before” or “announce publicly.” In Gal 3:1 the term is used in the second meaning. But the public announcement this time was given through Paul’s depiction of the crucified one with his words of proclamation before the eyes of Galatians. See J.L. Martyn, *AB32* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 283.

43 Prince, “Seeing Visions,” 343–345; G.A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984) 23; R.J. Whitaker, “The Poetics of Ekphrasis: Vivid Description and Rhetoric in the Apocalypse,” in *Poetik und Intertextualität der Johannesapokalypse*, ed. S. Alkier, T. Hieke und T. Nicklas; WUNT 326 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2015) 229–230; idem., *Ekphrasis, Vision and Persuasion in the Book of Revelation*. WUNT 2410 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2015) 41–45; G.M. Barnhill, “Seeing Christ through Hearing the Apocalypse: An Exploration of John’s Use of *Ekphrasis* in Revelation 1 and 19,” *JSNT* 39 (2017): 242–245.

enhance the vividness (*energeia*) and clarity (*sapheneia*) of the description (Theon, *Progymnasmata*, 119; Quin. *Inst.* 8.3.61–63; 9.2.40).⁴⁴ It is a kind of *pathos* which aims to appeal to the feelings of the listeners (Quin. *Inst.* 6.2.32).⁴⁵ The hearing of the proclamation depicting the crucified one as the Messiah led the Galatians to believe in the crucified one and they received the Spirit (Gal 3:1–2, 5).

In Romans 15 Paul refers to his missionary work among the Gentiles in retrospect (Rom 15:18–21). Paul preached the gospel orally and the Gentiles heard it and were converted to Christianity. On the other hand, he refers to the miracles he performed as the ‘signs and wonders’ which accompanied his proclamation in words (15:19; cf. 2 Cor 12:12).⁴⁶ Paul seems to presuppose the popular belief that they served to show in a concrete way that he was an authentic messenger of God (cf. Exod 4:8–9, 17, 30; 7:3, 8–9; 10:2; 11:9–10; Num 14:11, 22; Deut 4:34; 6:22; Isa 7:11, 14; 38:7–8; Mark 8:11–12 par.; John 6:30; Acts 7:36 etc.). The miracles conducted before his audience were regarded as the signs of apostleship (see also 1 Thess 1:5). Here again, some visible elements serve to strengthen the trustworthiness of the words of proclamation.

44 H. Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik. Eine Grundlage der Literaturwissenschaft* (4. Aufl.; Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2008): § 810.

45 Whitaker, “Poetics,” 230; idem., *Ekphrasis*, 58–60; Barnhill, “Seeing Christ,” 239–241.

46 With regard to the traditional terminology of calling miracle a ‘sign’ see K. H. Rengstorf, “σημεῖον,” *TDNT* 7 (1964): 200–269; O. Betz, “σημεῖον,” *EWNT* (2nd rev. ed.) 3 (1992): 569–575.

Apocalyptic Picture of the Parousia

In 1 Thess 4:15–18 Paul gives a graphic description of a series of events expected at the time of the parousia of the Lord: commanding voice of the archangel, sounds of God's trumpet, the descent of the Lord from heaven, resurrection of the dead, the ascent of the living to meet the Lord in the air. Obviously visual elements are predominant in this early Christian apocalyptic tradition. The tradition is cited in Paul's words of exhortation to console the Thessalonians mourning for those who passed away before the parousia (4:13).⁴⁷ Oral presentation in the form of conversation or speech was given a central place in communication between the people living in the Greco-Roman world.⁴⁸ A letter was considered a substitute for oral conversation (Dem. 223; Cic. *Ad Fam.* 2.4.1; 12.30.1).⁴⁹ This letter of exhortation was supposed to be read aloud before the congregation (cf. 1 Thess 5:27). The members of the church in Thessalonica listened to the recited words and presumably could gain a concrete image of the eschatological events in their mind. Visual elements were thus nurtured by auditory experience of the audience, for the image of the parousia was transmitted through the words of exhortation. Here again, the rhe-

47 J. Baumgarten, *Paulus und die Apokalyptik* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1975), 97–98.

48 With regard to the importance of oral communication in the Greco-Roman culture see W. J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 1988); P. J. Achtemeier, "Onme verbum sonat: The New Testament and the Oral Environment of Late Western Antiquity," *JBL* 109 (1990): 3–27.

49 A. Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 12.

torical means called *ekphrasis* (Theon, *Progymnasmata*, 118.7) is employed to enhance the persuasive power of the message.

Paul had a strong apocalyptic orientation in his theological thinking.⁵⁰ He was convinced that the parousia of the Lord was imminent (Rom 13:11; 1 Cor 1:4-9; 7:29-31; 2 Cor 5:10; Phil 1:3-11; 3:20). He believed that the dead would be raised at the time of the parousia (1 Cor 15:20-28; 1 Thess 4:13-18).⁵¹ The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ marks the beginning of the end time. The second Adam, namely, Jesus Christ introduced righteousness, grace, and life into the world which had been dominated by sin and death introduced by the sin of Adam (Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:20-22, 42-49).⁵²

With regard to sharing the apocalyptic drama of the end time with his converts Paul showed a reserved attitude. He did

50 See J. Baumgarten, *Paulus und die Apokalyptik* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1975), 59-146, 227-239; J. C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); R.B. Matlock, *Unveiling the Apocalyptic Paul: Paul's Interpreters and the Rhetoric of Criticism*. JSNTSup 127 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1996); J.L. Martin, "Apocalyptic Antinomies in Paul's Letter to the Galatians," *NTS* 31 (1985): 410-424; idem., *Galatians*. AB33A (New York: Doubleday, 1997) 97-105; J. Plevnik, *Paul and the Parousia: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997); B. R. Gaventa ed., *Apocalyptic Paul: Cosmos and Anthropos in Romans 5-8* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013); Charlesworth, "Apocalyptic Eschatology," 83-106. But Davies, *Paul among the Apocalypses?*, 41-203 sees the issue differently. He is opposed to the idea of the 'apocalyptic Paul' after examining his epistemology, eschatology, cosmology, and soteriology.

51 Plevnik, *Parousia*, 96; Charlesworth, "Paul, the Jewish Apocalypses, and Apocalyptic Eschatology," 97; M. Goff, "Heavenly Mysteries and Otherworldly Journeys," in *Paul the Jew*. G. Baccaccini and C. A. Segovia eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 136-140.

not reveal it to the Thessalonians till they asked him about the fate of those who had passed away before the parousia of the Lord (cf. 1 Thess 4:13-14). This reluctance was not caused by his negative stance toward visual elements contained in the apocalyptic tradition. His concern was so to speak pastoral. He was rather concerned they might become excessively preoccupied with the speculation on the details of the eschatological event of the parousia. He actually warned his Thessalonian readers against speculating on the concrete time of the parousia (1 Thess 5:1). The graphic depiction of the end time events could have caused excessive emotional reactions among the Thessalonian converts. He therefore withheld telling them the apocalyptic tradition describing the scene of the parousia at the initial time of evangelization in Thessalonica.

3. Conclusion

Paul shares with the earliest Christians the belief that 'faith comes from hearing (what is heard)' (Rom 10:17a). Hearing proceeds to believing. Nobody is able to believe without hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom 10:14). Auditory experience is an indispensable component of the process of believing the message. Early Christians listened to the words of proclamation and converted from their traditional religions to Christianity (Acts 2:41; 13:48; 1 Cor 2:1-5; 15:1-2; Gal 3:1-5; 1 Thess 1:9-10

52 M. C. de Boer, *The Defeat of Death: Apocalyptic Eschatology in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5*. JSNTSup 22 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 141-188; idem., "Paul and Apocalyptic Eschatology," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* 1 (1998): 360-361.

etc.).

Nevertheless, Paul's visionary experience reported in 2 Corinthians 12 shows a different aspect of the matter (2 Cor 12:1-2). He was caught up in heaven in ecstasy to see visions and hear extraordinary things (12:1-4). The visionary experiences contribute to enhancing the credibility of Paul's preaching activities (cf. 1 Enoch 1:2; 2 Bar 81:4; Rev 1:9-20).

Visual and auditory elements are not mutually exclusive in Paul's missionary activities. He described the crucified Jesus before his gentile audience with his words of proclamation (1 Cor 1:18; 2:1-5; Gal 3:1-5). The vivid visual image of the crucified one functioned as an effective means of persuasion called *ekphrasis* (Theon, *Progymnasmata*, 118.7). The audience in Corinth and Galatia heard his message and believed in the crucified Christ as their Messiah. Hearing and seeing joined together to strengthen his preaching activities as a missionary.

In his missionary activities Paul preached the gospel orally and the Gentiles who heard it were converted to Christianity (Rom 15:14-21). On the other hand, he refers to the miracles he performed as the 'signs and wonders' during his missionary activities (Rom 15:19; cf. 2 Cor 12:12). The miracles conducted before his audience were regarded as the signs of his apostleship (Rom 15:19; cf. 2 Cor 12:12; 1 Thess 1:5). Here again, some visible elements serve to strengthen the trustworthiness of his words of proclamation.

In 1 Thess 4:15-18 Paul gives a graphic description of a series of events expected at the time of the parousia of the Lord. Obviously visual elements are predominant in this early Christian apocalyptic tradition. The tradition is cited to console the

Thessalonians mourning for those who passed away before the parousia (4:13). Paul's letters were meant to be read aloud before the congregation (5:27). The Thessalonians' hope for the future was strengthened by the visual image of the end time events transmitted by Paul's words of exhortation.